

# THE PATHOS OF BEING GOOD

By Kate Jordan

(Mrs. F. M. Vermilye)

THE Englishwoman, who was learning odd things about the amusing, rich New Yorkers, had let her sables slip back from her shoulders and was contentedly sipping a brandy and soda in the American woman's boudoir. The latter, in loose silk and slippers, was drinking tea.

"I suppose, my dear Mrs. Dane, being a Van Vieck means something?" asked Lady Blount.

"Why, it means having an early eighteenth-century house on lower Second avenue, stacked from basement to roof with Colonial stuff that fairly reeks with the history of the family—a house where Lafayette danced with the hostess. Yes, it means something to be a Van Vieck in New York."

"How indigenous, my dear, is the greatness of untitled people! In Cork or Manchester, for instance, no one would feel any particular interest in this conspicuous Peter Van Vieck."

"But Peter hasn't only family——"

"Has he—that?"

"As we understand it. The first Van Vieck was a market gardener or a fur trader, of course, but like all those early Dutch hucksters who made money, he has a trail of gentry somewhere back of him in Holland or Spain or France."

"I like to hear you chaff your own set. It's so American."

"As I was saying, Peter Van Vieck has money. He is distressingly rich. He lives on about twenty or twenty-five thousand a year, while his scores of millions just roll and grow with the years."

"A born miser, who gets no fun out of life?"

"No; he's not of this age, that's all. The times don't suit Peter. To spend money on steam yachts or racing stables would be an immense bore. He is an explorer by nature, and he gives big sums to support his fads, but they don't even make dents in his fortune. He is very original—and oh, so good! I shall never forget the afternoon he came here and refused to marry me."

Mrs. Dane flung back her head and laughed unrestrainedly. Her loosened hair, which had not been waved that day, lent picturesqueness to her prettiness. She was only just past thirty, and the idea that any man had refused to marry her seemed absurd.

"What an ass!" said Lady Blount.

"Oh, I wouldn't have missed the experience for the world. You see it was this way: Mr. Dane was thirty-three years my senior. I was his ward. The poor, kind, near-sighted old dear didn't know what to do with me. Marriage was the only way out of the difficulty. As for me, I looked on him as my release from that dreadful Quebec convent. He died seven years ago, and left a curious clause in his will. He was famous as an antiquarian, and had collected a perfect museum. Well, he willed this to Peter if he and I married within three years after his death. If not, it went as a gift to his native Western town. Peter was a cousin of whom he was extravagantly fond. He used to say he was the only good man he ever found interesting. Well, Peter—a great chum

of mine, by the way—simply thirsted for that museum, but he wouldn't have me. I was too much of a prevalent type, he said. I don't suppose I *am* like anything you've ever seen on an old fresco, nor could any Egyptologist, no matter how much he was biased in my favor, by any chance discover that I am Cleopatra reincarnated. In fact, I'm a new soul, with the marks of the mint on me, and mundane to my very toes. So what chance had I with Peter, who feels akin to almost every age but this, and who hates the telephone and the automobile as devices of the devil? I like his eyes, those dreamy, dark-blue eyes, that seem always searching for what eludes him, and I like his millions, but—he won't have me."

"I'll bet you the best box of silk stockings in the Rue de la Paix you'll be aghast when you see what he does fall in love with some time and lead to the altar," said Lady Blount, in disgust; "some doll-eyed music-hall singer——"

"No, he'll never do that. Our men leave that for the titled johnnies of your island, my dear. Oh, he'll never fall in love at all. His passion is for unexplored mountain peaks, Egyptian tombs and things of that sort. He has a lot of men digging in Mexico now for something or other. But let me tell you the queerest thing he ever did. He had a valet years ago who was an odd creature. The man could scarcely read, but a fine painting, or music, or a beautiful scene used to tear him with a sort of agony, and he began to tell Peter of the strange yearnings that beauty roused in him. Peter insisted that he was miscast in the drama of life, got a tutor for him, made him enter college, settled a nice little annuity on him, and he is now a poet, with a new name and a manufactured history to match. But, ye gods! my dear, such poetry as he writes!"

Lady Blount shrugged her cape over her shoulders and finished her glass.

"It's a good thing he let that

museum slip. Such a husband would be a dreadful bore."

"And yet," said Mrs. Dane, softly, "I'd marry him to-morrow—to-night—in half an hour."

"His millions——"

"No, his eyes, his voice, his dear, honest, queer self, so different from the rest. If they're young and good-looking they're generally vain, and you wonder if the gray matter was left out when their skulls were built; if they've become interesting by reason of years and experience they think more of a good dinner than anything else. Now Peter is not goody-goody, but he is good. I'd take him with his dreams and his eyes and his child's heart. Some day, when his illusions go quite back on him, maybe he'll come to me."

"Why, I believe you are in love with the man!"

"Bless me! have you just found that out?"

## II

PETER seldom rode in a street car, and never before in one that clanged its insistent way after leisurely, provoking drays and beer wagons on the Bowery. He had come here to hunt for an old Russian collector, the possessor of a missal he coveted, and a whim had suggested his conducting the search in the most unobserved fashion. He was happy when a whim seized him, and followed it often when it seemed absurd or impossible.

With his explorer's instinct awake he looked at the people he sat among, and marveled at how dull and distasteful poverty was in the big cities of the civilized world. Otherwhere it was not repulsive; half-starved Bedouins craving a handful of figs; poor Algerian women in baggy trousers going up and down their stairwayed streets; bare-legged Irish peasants among the bogs, their cheeks like wild roses; West Indian slaves with bare, orange-colored backs and gaudy bandannas—all those could

please the eye, but these poor people of the city were only unclean, ill-nourished bodies in ugly clothes. They were the sort he helped generously through various charitable channels looked after by his secretary, but while he pitied them poignantly he instinctively shrank from them.

The woman diagonally opposite to him in the car suddenly turned round. She had been seated sideways, watching the street, and he had noticed only the low, massive knot of black hair beneath a worn brown turban, her threadbare jacket strained at the seams and the skirt with muddy edges. But when she turned his interest was seized and held. The car with its drab, disconsolate cargo caught a touch of rose color.

Peter sat back and studied her. If her beauty had been consistent with a Third avenue car—an unintellectual face with round eyes and baby mouth, for instance—he would have been only troubled that a pretty girl should be so poor. But this woman seemed alien to her environment. She had no business there at all. Her dark eyes, with lashes brushing her cheeks like moth wings, seemed heavy with a longing for France. So might a marquise of the fifteenth century have looked, a dreamy exquisite, capable, it might be, of softest cruelty, smiling in her rose-paneled boudoir as from affronted vanity she plotted treachery and revenge. So might Marion Delorme have looked as she swept through her gardens with her lapdogs following.

As he stared solemnly at the sad-eyed beauty, marking the petulance of her rose-red mouth, he saw in fancy a long line of ghostly belles, powdered and patched bewitchingly, eying him over their little fans, enter at one door of the car and pass out through the other into the gray air.

He blinked the waking dream away, and became aware that he was acutely depressed, touched in his most sensitive point—his idea of artistic fitness. Here was this lovely, opulent creature, a woman of France, fashioned by na-

ture for luxury, for ease, but placed by grim-visaged Circumstance in an environment that must mean a continual suffering and aggravation.

"A damask rose in the bosom of a drab would not be more contradictory," he thought.

She left the car at one of the miserable streets that straggle down to the East River. Without consciously deciding to do so, he followed her. The Russian collector was forgotten in this new quest. Yet none of the ordinary incentives of the situation was troubling Peter. The woman did not appeal to any personal sentiment. She was a new gem, badly set, a curio more interesting for the time being than the missal he had come to find.

Her walk pleased him. She advanced undulantly and with short steps, as a lazy beauty walks who, alighting briefly, is conveniently followed by her carriage. It hurt Peter to see her make her graceful way between ash heaps and the battered railings of houses that sheltered miseries.

At the open door of a dirty house smaller than the others she stopped. After a speculative glance at him over her shoulder she passed in. He went down the street, turned back and looked again at the doorway. Who was she? What was her name? What had been her mission that gray, muddy morning? A tin sign at the side of the door attracted him:

VINCENZO BOTTELLI

VIOLIN TAUGHT

*Music Furnished for Parties*

Ah, they danced among this wretchedness, did they? Was Vincenzo Bottelli her brother, her husband?

He was lingering indecisively when he saw a piece of folded yellow paper on the ground, and remembered vaguely that it had fluttered from her jacket as she entered the house. His search for treasures had often led him to pawnshops, and when he picked up the brown slip he recognized it as that affidavit of misery, a pawn-ticket.

At the top he saw the name, "Bottelli." She had pawned a coat.

Peter was too disturbed to continue the adventure to an end that day. Neither did the missal attract him now. He would go back to his own world and forget penury and ugliness. He put the pawn-ticket in his pocket, and at the corner took the car going up-town.

### III

HE was back again the next morning. During one of the gayest dinners of the Winter, with everyone in costume and a vaudeville skit following, the memory of this woman had been to him what a hair shirt is to a monk. There was nothing but goodness in Peter's heart as he went up those decrepit stairs and knocked at the first door he saw.

It was opened by the woman whose face had haunted him all night. She wore a flannel wrapper, the top button unfastened, leaving her full throat free. A flicker of recognition lighted her eyes.

"Good morning, sare," she said, resting on one foot, her hip lifted lazily; "weel you step in?"

Peter bowed and obeyed. At the sight of the room he felt his soul sicken. How could she live there with such a carpet? He looked once at the framed immortelles and mottoes on the walls, the rain-stained paper, and then for repose gazed at his boots. When he looked up the woman had buttoned her gown at the throat, and in an attitude of unwitting but superlative grace had seated herself against a worsted pillow on the sofa opposite.

"You weesh to see my 'osban' for music, sare? 'E is in Cincinnati," she began, but Peter held out the pawn-ticket. "Oh, how I 'ave look for heem," she exclaimed, seizing it; "you found heem?"

"Yes, I found it," said Peter, in French.

At the words he had the satisfaction of seeing her face grow wistfully happy, like an expectant child's.

"I thank you very much indeed," she said, in the same tongue, and though her accent was not quite of the Faubourg, it was very pretty.

She waited, and Peter looked again at his boots. How could he put in words what he had expressly come to say? He was quite aware of the unusualness of his intention, and feared his interest might bear the common interpretation. But he was used to doing the exceptional thing. Only the introduction was difficult; that over, it was easy sailing.

"Your husband, madame, is a musician—Bottelli—name on the door?" he said at last, in his pleasant voice.

"Yes. He is now in Cincinnati. He was promised a place in an orchestra there. The Winter here has been hard."

While she answered him he could see that he puzzled her. If he had only come to return the pawn-ticket she was wondering why he sat there as if he meant to stay.

"You are poor. Are you not very poor?" he blurted, his face coloring. "Forgive me if I hurt you."

"You do not hurt me. *Me voici*, I am poor!" and looking down at her dingy gown, she held up the pawn-ticket and gave a dismal laugh.

"You long for France, don't you?—for Paris, perhaps?" he said, eagerly, and a gladness for having followed his impulse rushed over him when he saw a luxurious longing pass as a veil over her soft eyes.

"Ah, Paris!" she sighed; "that is far away—no more for me. *Oh, mon cher Paris, je ne vous reverrai jamais.*"

Peter's kind heart fairly yearned over her in paternal fashion. She was so lovely as she sat there amid squalor, lamenting her lost land. The thought of his useless millions and what might be done with an infinitesimal part of them comforted him.

"You must not despair, madame," he said, rising, "I may be able to help you to return to Paris, if you will let me. You know nothing about me, but you can find out. Here is

my card and address. Will you permit me to become one of your friends?"

The woman's dimpled mouth trembled curiously for an instant and her lashes fell. She looked at his card and seemed considering his proposition seriously.

"Sir," she said, slowly, at last, "all that you say to me fills me with hope—but I am puzzled. I see you are the great, rich man the papers talk so much about—but I don't understand. You wish to be my friend, to help me as you say? Why do you do this for me—for me?" and she laid her index finger on her bosom.

Peter's nature was not complex. He never left the straight and simple path of honesty except when to remain there was suicidal. The amazing truth was the first thing that occurred to him. Standing there, young, good-looking, the marks of the fine world upon him, his dark-blue eyes filled with the enthusiast's fervor, he made his uncompromising explanation.

"I wish to serve you unselfishly, madame. Please do not misunderstand me. I am attracted to you only to help you, as I would a child. My course of action is unusual, but then I am one of life's exceptions. I am fortunate enough to be able to follow my impulses—anywhere. To see you as you are, poor, misplaced, takes away satisfaction in my own life. The first glimpse I had of you in the car told me you were unhappy. I knew your dream was for France, and France without the bane of poverty. I cannot put away such impressions lightly, madame. If I did so I should seem to myself a thing wholly of clay. Thank God, I need never crucify a generous instinct. But I am not a philanthropist in the practical sense alone. I am also a worshiper of beauty in any form. Your beauty, like a red rose heavy with perfume, but set in a swamp, made its own silent prayer to me without your knowing it, and so—I am here."

Madame Bottelli still fingered the card, looking down. She smiled

shyly when after a pause she answered him:

"You may come—any time."

#### IV

PETER found his way three times to Stanton street, in the late gray afternoons, his coming preceded by a box of roses.

Madame Bottelli's face had changed in expression since the day she dropped the pawn-ticket. It was electric with hope and suspense, her beauty acquiring a new emphasis that would have troubled any benefactor not as uniquely good as Peter.

He could see she made attempts to improve her poor gowns with bits of tawdry lace. Sometimes she wore one of his roses in her hair, a badge of coquetry. She gave him coffee in a cheap Japanese cup without a handle, and he drank it uncomplainingly. What his set might think could they have seen him, whose *cordon bleu* was famous, drinking coffee in a tenement house with a poor beauty in a pink wrapper, never even faintly troubled him. He was heart and soul obsessed by his idea, the longing to rescue this woman from the juggling of an unkind fate and give her the place she was fitted for in the world—give her happiness. She was so truly a woman of France, fashioned so strikingly for "perfumes, soft textures, lace, a half-lit room."

On this third visit the conversation took a practical tone. It was time to speak of her husband. The fact that she had one rather spoiled the picture. As a type Madame Bottelli should have been anything except a prosaically devoted wife. Peter felt a desire to wipe out the husband as he would a false shadow in a painting. But the man existed, and if she loved him, why, he must reap the benefit of having a wife who suggested a French marquise to an eccentrically good and beneficent millionaire with a penchant for originality.

"Since you will permit me to help you," said Peter, serious-eyed, "I will make arrangements by which

you will receive an income sufficient for you to live comfortably in Paris, enough to afford you some luxuries, too, madame. What you require for a proper wardrobe before leaving and your passage money I will give you whenever you wish. Then leave this place behind you forever—have what you desire!”

“How good you are to me!” murmured Madame Bottelli, giving him a soft glance full of meanings quite lost on her companion. “Oh, my friend!” She covered her eyes with her handkerchief and extended her hand. Peter pressed it abruptly in his honest clasp, and dropped it.

“Now, madame, to speak of your husband——”

“My husband!” and a bitter sadness saturated eyes and voice.

“You will want him to live in Paris also?” he asked.

“If you think it—wise,” she said with hesitation, while she tried to read his face.

She did not quite understand this rich man. His admiration was evasive. If he would only speak out! Of course he was *épris*; if he would only say so frankly and arrange with her about the best way of getting rid of the absent violinist altogether! She nibbled a rose and watched him narrowly.

“Wise?” asked Peter, and laughed; “well, I suppose that is hardly the word. It is for you to decide, Madame Bottelli. I am here to place you in a different environment. If your happiness demand that your husband be benefited also, go with you, there is nothing more to be said. I never asked you before, but—pardon me—do you love your husband?”

“No!” she said, fiercely, and snapped her fingers to typify an immeasurable scorn.

“Is he not kind to you?”

“He is—a brute!” and she found her handkerchief useful again. “Oh, do not speak of him, my friend. He shall be nothing to me—nothing—nothing—I swear it.”

Her words made Peter uncomfortable. He stood up.

“Well, we’ll say no more of him——”

“*Je le déteste!*” murmured the woman.

She flung down the rose and went nearer to him.

“You say I am beautiful?” she asked, and never looked more lovely than when she spoke, her eyes lifted languishingly.

“It was because of your beauty I was first attracted to help you. Ah, life is cruelly unfair to ugly people, madame. I dare say the destinies of women have often depended on the length of an eyelash or the play of a dimple.”

She ventured nearer.

“You will come often to Paris?”

“Why—I don’t know,” he said, vaguely.

“But you will like to see me?” she cried, in frank amaze.

“Well, I may look in to see how the new life suits you.”

“Ah, why do you not tell me—something?” she murmured, her lips pursed invitingly.

“Haven’t I told you a great deal?”

“But not that you love me. You are a strange man.”

Her words roused Peter from a sort of sleep. Surprise, weariness and distaste mingled in the sensation that rushed over him. So she had completely misunderstood him, despite his sincere, unromantic attitude! Well, no wonder. Experience was a mean-souled teacher to a poor and beautiful woman, impressing on her always one idea—that a man’s interest must first and last be a thing of sex, always for the woman and never for the human being.

She drew back, paling, before his stern glance.

“I don’t love you. You have mistaken my reasons for wishing to befriend you.”

“Oh, forgive me!” she whimpered.

“If you can imagine me in the light of a father, or a benevolent uncle, kindly do so,” he said, sharply.

Madame Bottelli followed him to the door, her lips quivering nervously.

“You will still be my friend? You

will let me live in my adored Paris?" she faltered.

"I have promised. Only be as honest with me as I am with you."

# V

It was the tea hour at Mrs. Dane's. The candles were winking like stars, and their soft light, mingling with the flames' glow from the hearth and the afternoon grayness stealing between loopholes in the rose-lined curtains, produced in the nest of a room a mystical atmospheric effect eminently efficacious in bringing out the best in Mrs. Dane's carefully applied coloring.

The butler was carrying in the big silver tray laden with muffins, cups and a steaming kettle. A footman followed with the siphons and decanters. Just after them came Peter Van Vieck.

A discussion of chiffons for a month at Monte Carlo grew suddenly uninteresting to Mrs. Dane, as above the women's rose-trimmed toques she met his serene blue eyes, where the ghost of a smile hesitated. The heart under her laces was the most modish in New York, well schooled, experienced, practical, yet it gave a distinctly painful pulsation when she saw him. There was, however, no sentiment in her first remark when the other callers had departed.

"Peter, you are a good deal of a brute, do you know?" she said, in a hard little voice, as she pushed a big chair to the fender.

"What have I done now?"

"You didn't put your nose into my box last night, although I shook my fan at you."

"You looked threatening, and I'm afraid of you."

"I wish you were," she said, defiantly; "I wish you were anything but negative. Why didn't you come up to me last night?"

"That fool Lever was hanging over you."

"Well, somebody must hang, if you won't."

"Besides, I was just emerging from 'Cavalleria' and preparing for 'I Pagliacci.' I never enjoy the opera unless I can manage to forget the cable cars clanging outside and the illuminated signs advertising pickles."

"Poor Peter!" she said, in her soft voice, and she caressed him with her eyes; "you always seem to me like a child still in the first throes of its disappointment on realizing that Santa Claus is a fiction. What will you do, I wonder, when you find that no matter how much we search or experiment we never get a substitute for the old Dutch saint with his magical reindeer? Eh, what will you do?"

"What all small boys do—bury my head in somebody's lap for comfort."

His eyes were so winning, the attraction he had for her so strong she grew provoked as she pondered on his genial indifference.

"What have you been doing with yourself?" she asked, brusquely, as she shot out toward the blaze two small feet in slippers made chiefly of enormous buckles. "You've gone almost nowhere, but you occupy yourself some way, I suppose."

"I'm getting ready for another onslaught on Egypt. Do you know, we have reason to think that those last tombs, far in the interior, near——"

"Oh, yes, I know. You'll probably find a few pots and kettles, or eye teeth, or something to tell you that somebody lived there quite a while ago. Spare me details, Peter, and have another peg."

"No, but I'll smoke."

"So will I—one of yours. I adore this kind of cigarette," she said, making a grimace; "but hints are wasted on you. Do for heaven's sake send me some."

Peter looked conscience-stricken.

"Why, Hilda, I'm sorry," he stammered, flushing; "please always ask for whatever you want. You see, I'm afraid I'm something of a fool about some things. Now what else do you want besides cigarettes?"

If she only dared tell him! His big, brown hand almost touched hers on the arm of the chair. An irri-

tating desire made her advance her little finger till their two hands rested side by side. She could see that while she had an acute and painful sense of the touch he was unaware of her mute invitation.

"Oh, I want such a lot of things," she said, with a hard little laugh; "but even your philanthropy, dear old boy, couldn't help me. I've a natural perversity for wanting the jam on the top shelf quite out of reach."

He looked genuinely troubled at her words as he stood up.

"I only wish I could get that jam for you, Hilda," he said, in a soft voice but with energy and almost tragic earnestness. "See here, can I?"

She laughed and pushed him backward with one exquisite finger.

"You goose! Of course I'd tell you if there were anything you could give me," and she looked straight into his eyes, a bitter sadness in her own.

"I want you to feel that always," he said, as he pressed her hand. "What's the good of having a chum if you can't tell him everything?"

Mrs. Dane nodded her elaborately coiffed little head, gave a tinkling laugh and touched the bell.

When he was gone she remained in front of the fire, biting a corner of her handkerchief. She was going to Monte Carlo, and she had trunks full of ravishing gowns that seemed made of nothing more substantial than crystals, sea shimmerings, sunsets or filigreed snow, but all she wanted in the world was for Peter to put his arms round her and kiss her on the mouth.

## VI

"I'LL conclude the whole business this morning," thought Peter on the following day, as his hansom turned into Stanton street between rows of staring children.

Madame Bottelli's words about love on the previous visit had somewhat belittled his benevolent schemes in his own mind. He was more genuinely sorry for her than ever, but one

of the barbed-wire fences that custom erects in life against trespassers had scraped him a little, and he was now really awake to the fact that even the best intentioned must beware of them or scale them gingerly.

"Poor little woman!" he was thinking; "it was most natural, after all, that she should suppose I was really thinking selfishly of her *beaux yeux*. Only certain combinations of circumstances are permissible in life; try to do a little original juggling, and the Conventional, like a stage manager, steps out from the wings and lands you one between the eyes. It will be refreshing for her to realize that a man can befriend a woman without the eternal refrain—pay, pay, pay!"

He plunged into the darkness of the ill-smelling hall, and at the top of the stairs came face to face with a portly German woman whose salient physical characteristics were a multiplicity of chins, a toothless smile and elbows smoking from hot suds.

"*Ach*, you come to zee Madame Bottelli—I know—yes! She get called kervick to her husband's mooter in ze hospital in a hurry, but I have a pass key and can let you in. She vill be back soon—yes."

"Thank you," said Peter, eying this new type with a passing curiosity, and trying to think why she kept her frightened gaze on him as if he were a thief; "I'll go in and write a few lines. That will be sufficient."

The room gave proof of Madame Bottelli's hurried departure. Some of her clothes lay on the sofa, among them a wrapper with the sleeves flung up, giving it the look of an inert and anguished body. The uninterrupted sunlight poured in on the remnants of a hasty breakfast and a fireless stove.

The place was so rankly ugly and stale that Peter felt his gorge rise. He flung down his hat, cane and gloves, and went to a table where an ink bottle stood. When he sat down and drew some paper toward him his arm pushed aside a blotter, and under it he saw a partially written letter. His own name flared up at him from the



mass of French words, and then a phrase caught his eye that made him gasp. After that he leaned on his elbow and read it all:

MY ADORED, MY OWN, MY SWEET VINCENZO:

Ah, how your last letter has troubled me! Your words like fire wrap my heart—I feel as if burning needles pricked my flesh. Oh, you are cruel! Oh, how I suffer! Could you believe that your Valérie would ever take back from her Vincenzo the heart once given? Adored one, behold me on my knees to you.

All that I have said is true.

I love you—you only—you forever.

Listen now, my Vincenzo, desire of my life, heart of me—listen. I did believe that Monsieur Van Vieck was enamored of me, and for the sake of the money I meant to play with him a little, then I meant to use the money in the dear Paris or in your own Genoa—but with you, *amico*, always with you, and snap my fingers at him with a la-la-la! As my patron saint hears me I am not deceiving you.

But, peerless one, I was mistaken, and here is now more truth—the poor gentleman is quite crazy. He is rich, rich, rich—but he is mad. He wants to pour his gold into your Valérie's hand *for no reason whatever*, my own *precioso*. Ah, it was pitiful the other day to see his rage when I ventured to speak of love—just to sound him, *cara mia*. His eyes flashed with anger, and he denounced me. Poor young man, he does not look mad, either—quite gentle and with such a sweet smile. But would I have my Vincenzo so, even with all his money? No, my angel, no!

The letter ended here. Peter sat for a moment, his elbows squared, his hands in his pockets, then he flung back his head, a howl of laughter not heard from his lips since college days shattering the silence. Again and again the roar came, while the breakfast dishes tinkled from the vibrations and the limp wrapper slipped from the sofa to the floor as if crushed into humiliation by the ironic merriment.

"Gott!" exclaimed the German woman, sticking her head in and withdrawing it rapidly, her fat face pasty white.

"Oh, now I know why she looked

scared," said Peter aloud, kicking in ecstasy; "she was told I was crazy. Oh, Lord! oh, Lord!"

When calmness came he dried his eyes and sat in thought. His transplantation scheme, of course, was dead, yet the miserable room still touched him to pity. He nodded slowly as he folded the letter and put it into his pocket. After a little more thought he wrote the following:

I have found the letter to your husband and I am taking it away as a souvenir of my acquaintance with you, but I am paying for it. You will not object when I leave you a cheque for a thousand dollars. It is worth that much to me. Adieu, madame.

## VII

THREE years spent almost entirely in Egypt left Peter browner, thinner and with a look of unchanging weariness where of old the dreaming had been.

He was in Paris, the May sunshine glinting in his eyes, the softness of the May breezes in his face. He was just thirty-six, with as many millions as his years; he was free, and in Paris at the floodtide of its loveliest season. These things would make for happiness with most men, but not with Peter. Why not?

He rose abruptly from the café table, stooped to pass under the fluttering awning and joined the Boulevard promenaders.

"Why not? why not?" So the omnibuses rolling on to the Madeleine seemed to drone, as he made his lonely way among the crowd.

He need not have been alone. There were plenty of his friends in Paris. He might at that moment have been taking tea in the Rue de Lille with a little marquise. But distaste of everything had him in its grip. His soul seemed to be drenched in an acid that bit out color and fibre.

He turned into the Rue d'Eschelle, his mental vision directed inward to his own pointless craving, when he heard a voice call his name in ringing accents of delight and amazement.

He wheeled round. A woman was standing on the stone step outside a shop door. Her hand was extended in greeting. She was a very fat brunette, with pretty, dark eyes and a mottled skin. She was white-aproned, and rolls of protecting white paper extended above her elbows. In the window of the shop behind her there were cheeses, jellied meats, cold joints. "*Charcuterie*" flamed in gilt on the glass, and under it "Bottelli."

There was no discrediting his eyes. The woman was Madame Bottelli—with additions. The pensive discontent that had once made her eyes so lovely was replaced by an aggressive good-humor and businesslike alertness of glance; the eyes were smaller, too, pushed up by the layers of flesh under them. Once she had stirred Peter's soul by suggesting the anguish of unrest, of unsatisfied longings; now she suggested the complacency of large profits, with a substantial dinner in the near future.

Her delight was so excessive that her fat, crimson cheeks quivered like one of the jellies in the window, and she caught Peter's coat sleeve.

"Come, my benefactor—come and meet my husband."

He found himself in the shop—cheeses under glass in front of him, dried shallots hanging on strings behind him, Madame Bottelli jabbering broken exclamations of delight in front of him as she yelled for Vincenzo and at the same time commenced to slice *jambon* thinly for a customer who had entered, wielding the long, razor-like knife with a rapid dexterity that dazed Peter.

"It is he!" she cried to the black-haired little man, fantastically arrayed, who rushed out; "it is the generous American who made us rich. Salute him, Vincenzo. But for him and me—ah, where would you be now?"

It was easy to see that Madame Bottelli was the ruling spirit. Vincenzo gave her a cringing glance, and his hand felt greasy to Peter's palm.

"Madame has told me," he quav-

ered. "Ah, it was magnificent! *Dio*, how gladly I laid aside the miserable violin for—this. Ah, what a fortune that excellent woman received from you!"

Peter's eyes grew curious.

"But I gave no fortune."

"Five thousand francs!" shrieked Madame Bottelli. "So modestly, too! Ah, that poor letter—and you did not hate me for speaking the truth? No? You said I should have Paris as I dreamed of it—"

"And this is—your dream?" asked Peter, slowly, looking round.

"Yes; is it not fine? The business is mine. Ah, Vincenzo could be much of a fool," she said, confidentially, "but he knows I would turn him out—pif!—into the street." She leaned restfully on the handle of a big carving knife, and continued: "I knew that to sell what must be eaten pays. Ah, *mon Dieu!* we all have to think of the appetite—*n'est-ce pas?* Look, too," she added, with a proprietary flourish, as Vincenzo, who had darted into the back room, reappeared with a big-faced baby; "behold my cherub, monsieur. He came after the shop began to pay."

Peter made several abortive attempts to leave, but the farewells were so extended, the pair so servile in their gratitude, it seemed an eternity before he found himself in the street. His hand seemed to reek of grease.

He knew now that he had once manufactured desires for Madame Bottelli out of his own tastes and needs, and had found them materialized for her in cheeses, mounds of cold meats and pats of butter. Besides, her worst characteristics had been strengthened by the possession of money, and one more tyrant had been added to the world. His expression was chastened.

"Death of another fantasy," thought Peter, as he took himself and his weariness to his hotel. Then with the finality born of disgust he put from him all willing memory of the Bottelli experiment.

The next morning, as in the same

aimless mood he dressed for the day's dreariness, a note was brought to him.

I heard you were at the Bristol. I have a little apartment on the Parc Monceau. I give tea and talk to those I like at four o'clock. Will you come to-day? Do you know it is almost three years since I've seen you? Lucette takes this, and will wait for your answer.

HILDA.

As he looked at the big, crooked letters a warmth stole sluggishly through him, and the crust of his boredom was broken by a widening seam. He had not been aware of it before, but he knew now that Hilda Dane was the only creature in whose company he could feel really glad to be. He was never bored with her. Perhaps he had even missed her. Paris made piquant by verbal fist-cuffs with her, made warm by her sympathy, but thinly veiled by a habit of laughing mockery—and Paris without her were two different places.

He sent off an answer, settled down with his secretary to a morning of business correspondence to agents and lawyers in America until the midday *déjeuner*, then with a cigar went into the May sun.

Yesterday he had walked without aim or destination. To-day there was a pleasant definiteness in his movements, and when he analyzed his emotions he found he was living in the expectancy of four o'clock at Mrs. Dane's.

When he passed the Madeleine the flowers massed in the market there sent him a message, though yesterday they had had none for him. They suggested that the little apartment on the Parc Monceau might look well made radiant by their beauty, and that the mistress of it might be a degree more perfect against the background of blossoms. He bought out three voluble venders, and despatched them with the violets, marigolds and narcissus.

It was half-past two when he strolled into the Rue de la Paix; it was five minutes later when he felt

himself prodded in the shoulder with something sharp, and heard a voice say:

"Peter!"

There was Mrs. Dane waving the attacking parasol at him and just stepping into a victoria.

"This is luck," he said, boyish delight brightening his worn face.

"Do you think so, Peter? How you have shied at your luck, then, for three years!" she said, with the defiant little laugh he remembered.

"Jump in."

Had she followed her crude, natural impulse, there in the Rue de la Paix, in the sight of all men, she would have wept for joy, hugged him, and boxed his ears. Why did he have ideals? Or if he must have them, why was she too faulty to be one of them?

"Where shall we go?" she asked.

"To the Bois?"

"Too early, you savage. Let's go where it's shady and have a drink."

"Feed me with rickeys, comfort me with Scotches and sodas, for I am sick at heart," paraphrased Peter, and they drove to the Bodega.

"How do I look?" asked Hilda, as they seated themselves in a remote corner.

"Still fresh and pretty as ever."

"Still fresh! Oh, for heaven's sake please never say that again. It's as awful as 'well preserved.' You know my age, Peter, alas!" Then she laughed in his face. "But I dare you, I double-dare you to remember it. You see I wear white now, from crown to toe—so girlish, you know. But one thing I promise you—I shall never adopt the ingénue manner. But I haven't told you how you look."

"Revenge yourself by calling me fresh."

"You look," she said, seriously, "as if you'd done with everything."

"No, everything has done me."

"You look like a smoked herring with sad eyes."

"Is that the best you can do for me? You won't make me vain, at any rate. Here comes our man. Now

see if I don't remember how to make a peg to your liking."

As the soda rushed from the siphon Mrs. Dane sat strangely quiet and watched him. How well those pretty, worldly eyes read all the marks written on his fine face!

"Well?" asked Peter, as he sat back; "your gaze is an inquisition."

"What a map the face can be when one doesn't employ a *masseur*," she said, thoughtfully, leaning on her elbow.

"Meaning me?"

"Yes. What's come to you? What's marked you as a disappointed man?"

"My dear Hilda, to tell you all would bore you. Let me summarize. I've found there are few things men and women will not sell for money. I put my trust in men concerned in this Egyptian business, actuated by the frenzy of the explorer, by the longing to discover something that would benefit the world. Well, they fooled me. I was a good thing. They drained me of what money they could and hoaxed me. I have misunderstood almost everyone I've tried to help; all have laughed at me behind their hands. My dreams for them have proved only dreams. By nature I am an image maker. I've worshiped beauty in life with a pagan intensity, and now my very marrow seems atrophied with disillusion." His smile was almost a contradiction to his weary words, but he nodded, and added: "It is true."

Mrs. Dane leaned nearer, her cheeks a deepening pink under her white veil.

"You have been too good," she said, emphatically; "that's the trouble. Continue to relieve distress, since you are rich and suffering hurts you, but don't idealize the sufferers. Don't expect too much of our miserable human nature, my dear Peter. It can't live up to your ideal of it."

"I hope you don't think me a prig."

"Not at all. You are unique. The simple, unconscious goodness of a pure boy has grown up with you, that's all."

"Well, Hilda," he said, in a new, definite tone, "you've often told me to fling my dreams overboard and be normal. Is that your counsel still?"

"Yes. You're hardly human, you're so good," she said, wrinkling her little nose in mockery.

"Here then, over our pegs, I make my confession. I find that when all's said and done the best thing the world affords is the companionship of a pretty, bright woman who understands life and accepts it with the shrug of a philosopher."

"Good. You are tacking all right now."

"Am I? Then I'll keep on," and a tenderness came into his eyes which made her heart beat faster. "Will you have me, Hilda?"

"Have you?"

"Marry me—for I love you! Will you?"

Her lashes flickered. When she looked at him fully all her love and a mist were in her eyes.

"I've waited for those words for six years. Six years wasted! Six years we can never have back!" Then her laughter came again. "I'd like to beat you."

"Dear Hilda," said Peter, managing to fold a finger round hers, "I'm a dull pupil. It took me all this time to find out that instead of needing all the phantoms I was pursuing I needed only you. Shall we go?"

"Home?"

That slow word in her soft voice suggested heaven to his weary spirit. But he smiled and shook his head.

"Afterward, dear. But first to the Rue de la Paix. I saw a string of pearls there the other day that might have tempted a more exacting creature than simple little *Marguerite*. They'll look so well with these pure white gowns of yours."

But Hilda did not wait for him to finish. She sprang up, her eyes glowing, and as they were now alone in the place she put her hand on his shoulder.

"Peter, you angel! How you are improving!"